



Cal/EPA

# Operator Certification



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## Defining Compliance

### Paperwork is a Necessity at Your Wastewater Plant

The Division of Clean Water programs recognizes that not all operators are able to personally attend conferences and conventions. This is the fourth in a series of articles outlining material presented by the Division at conferences and conventions. A presentation specifically outlining subjects of concern for certification compliance is available through the Division at any location showing sufficient interest.

Documentation and paperwork are items that an operator will deal with throughout their career. The skill most often used by an operator on a day-to-day basis is their ability to communicate. By recording meter readings, test results and making logbook entries of whatever happens at the wastewater plant, the operator communicates the health and well being of the wastewater plant.

Everyday, wastewater treatment plant operators do plant rounds and record the many meter and gage readings of equipment throughout the wastewater plant. Anytime a meter or gage reading is recorded, it should be recorded exactly as it reads. Never record what you "think it should be" reading. If you suspect that the meter or gage is incorrect, you can look into it further if you have the expertise. Or, you should contact a maintenance or instrumentation technician to check out the meter or gage. Should it turn out that the meter or gage has a correct but unusual reading, then further investigation is warranted to discover the cause of the unusual reading.

It is essential that laboratory and process control test results be accurately recorded. Changing a laboratory result could threaten your operator certification. It is recommended that any and all laboratory results be recorded exactly. Do not throw out any test result and then redo it until an acceptable result is obtained. Throwing out test results is the same as recording a false result. Falsifying wastewater plant test results is a criminal offense.

Many items should be recorded in a bound plant logbook. However, there are many things that do not belong in the plant logbook. Items that do not belong in a bound logbook include foul language, rumor and conjecture, incorrect data, false statements, and misleading information. Using "white out" or liquid paper to obliterate an entry is not recommended. If you make a mistake, cross a single line through your error and then continue your entry.

Keeping a bound logbook involves more than writing down today's date and that everything at the wastewater plant is "Ok." At a minimum, a suggested daily logbook entry includes:

- Date.
- Start time of shift.
- Names of personnel on shift.
- Weather observations.
- How the plant process looks during plant rounds.
- Any laboratory or process test results indicating a violation of waste discharge requirements.

With downsizing and job duties making an operator's daily routine increasingly fast paced and hectic, often times day-to-day activities are forgotten. However, many should to be included in the logbook. Also suggested as important logbook entries are:

- Any process control adjustments.
- Indicators of process upset or pending waste discharge permit violation.
- Putting in or taking out of service any major unit process basin or tank, or the rotation of equipment.
- Deliveries of chemicals, supplies, etc.
- Visitors, including other employees not assigned to the shift.

Always include the time for any of the above suggested entries. Try to be as accurate and concise as possible. Do your best to make your logbook have an exact meaning with as little room for an incorrect interpretation as possible. Choose your words to mean exactly what you would like the next shift operator to understand.

The logbook is a messenger with important information for the wastewater treatment plant operator. It is a record of what goes on at the plant site during each moment of the wastewater plant's existence. You are trying to relay to the next shift operator what has happened on your shift, and possibly warn of what might occur on their shift. All of the suggested items will assist the next shift operator in performing their duties while at the same time

cover you in the proper operation and documentation of your wastewater treatment plant.

# New Place, New Certification Administrator, Reorganization

The Office of Operator Certification and State Water Resources Control Board, under the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA), has set up a new shop in downtown Sacramento at 1001 I Street. The Joe Serna Jr. Cal/EPA Headquarters building is the new home to the Environmental.

Protection Agency, Air Resources Board, Department of Pesticide Regulation, Department of Toxic Substances Control, Integrated Waste Management Board, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, and the State Water Resources Control Board. The City of Sacramento owns the building.

Operators planning a visit will find custom-designed artwork demonstrating the integration of art and the environment throughout the building, both inside and out. A Sacramento City ordinance requires a certain percentage of capital improvement construction costs be set aside for public art.

An eighteen-foot high stone sculpture stands and rests atop a mound at the courtyard entrance with a grove of sequoia trees serving as a backdrop.

Inside the lobby at the base of the staircase leading to the second floor is a stainless steel sculpture by artist Richard Hunt. The abstract metal sculpture was specifically created for the Cal/EPA building.

On the second floor are two chandeliers designed by artist Dale Chihuly that are made of hundreds of pieces of yellow and green blown glass in organic-like forms.

Also throughout the building are eight environmental quilts by artist Merle Serlin, which represent some of California's environmentally sensitive geographic areas and provide an interesting contrast to the larger artworks of stone, brushed aluminum, and glass.

Besides the change of location, the Office of Operator Certification has a new addition. Ms. Jennifer Nitta started on April 25, 2001 as the new Operator Certification Administrator. Ms. Nitta has been in California State service for 11 years and previously worked in the Department of Social Services in the Disability and Adult Programs. To assist her in evaluating wastewater treatment plant

operator applications, Ms. Nitta brings a health sciences degree from University of California San Francisco. Operators should note that the general number for the Office of Operator Certification is now, (916) 341-5819.

In the Division of Clean Water Programs, Loans and Grants Branch there has been a reorganization. The Loans and Grants Branch has a major responsibility in the administration of the State Revolving Fund (SRF). The SRF provides low interest loan money to public agencies for building new wastewater treatment facilities or increasing the treatment removal or capacity of their current wastewater treatment facilities.

Engineers that formerly handled a small portion of the SRF process now oversee and manage the applicant's SRF loan throughout the complete process. Wastewater treatment plant operator compliance complaints will no longer be investigated by a single unit of engineers and will be spread out among the many engineers within the Loans and Grants Branch for investigation.

## Wastewater Examination Passing Rates

For all grade levels, except Grade III, the wastewater operator examination passing rates decreased slightly from Spring 2000 to Fall 2000. Table 1 gives the number of operators tested, the number of operators who passed, and the percentage of those passing each of the last two operator certification exams.

Table 1 : Certification Exam Statistics

| Date | April 1, 2000 |        |        | October 7, 2000 |        |        |
|------|---------------|--------|--------|-----------------|--------|--------|
|      | Tested        | Passed | % Pass | Tested          | Passed | % Pass |
| I    | 121           | 86     | 71     | 122             | 81     | 66     |
| II   | 152           | 95     | 62     | 105             | 47     | 45     |
| III  | 96            | 33     | 34     | 115             | 50     | 43     |
| IV   | 37            | 21     | 57     | 35              | 6      | 17     |
| V    | 46            | 23     | 50     | 35              | 7      | 20     |

## Questions and Answers on Wastewater Operator Certification

Questions about wastewater treatment plant operator certification are always being asked. Certain questions seem to be asked more frequently than others. Below are some of the recent questions asked by wastewater treatment plant operators.

**Q:** Will I need to go back to school and take wastewater treatment classes to keep my operator certificate?

**A:** The discussion to require Continuing Educational Units for wastewater treatment plant operators is periodically contemplated. Currently (although always subject to change) there are no such requirements of California wastewater treatment plant operators to obtain Continuing Educational Units to retain their certification.

**Q:** If I pass a Grade V wastewater operator certification examination, may I obtain a certificate of a lower grade?

**A:** By passing a California wastewater operator examination, a person has established their competence at that grade level. Once a test has been successfully passed, a person may choose to satisfy the requirements of a lower grade level and receive the certificate for that lower grade level.

**Q:** Can I receive a California wastewater operator certificate by reciprocity?

**A:** Reciprocity means receiving a California wastewater treatment plant operator certificate without any examination or examination fee. Operators entering California will find that they are limited to

receiving a Grade I or Grade II certificate by reciprocity. There are several requirements that must be satisfied for reciprocity, which are:

- Reciprocal privileges are granted by the other state; and,
- The candidate must have passed a test in another state comparable (alike) to the California examination within the preceding four years; and,
- A reciprocal certificate is only granted if the certificate from the other state was obtained with requirements (experience and education) that are comparable to California requirements; and,
- The applicant completes an application showing that minimum certification qualifications are satisfied and pays the application, certification and reciprocity fees.

**Q:** Will my Operator-in-Training time count if I switch jobs before I get in my one year of qualifying experience?

**A:** Wastewater treatment plant operator experience, whether obtained as an Operator-in-Training or at a higher certification level, never expires and forever belongs to you as an operator. Some of the more restless people in the industry might find that it is a good idea to keep copies of documents that show appropriate qualifying wastewater

operator experience (time sheets, pay stubs, copies of logbook, etc.), just in case.

**Q:** If I have special requirements to take an examination, can I get reasonable accommodations?

**A:** Those persons with special requirements will receive reasonable accommodations to take the operator certification examination. A request for an accommodation must be included at the time of application.

**Q:** When can I see my graded operator certification examination?

**A:** Only those who do not pass their operator certification examination are allowed to review their exam. Persons receiving a passing score on their operator certification examination will not be allowed to review their test. Persons receiving a failing score will receive a notice of when and where the exam reviews will be held, and who to call to schedule a review time. A person who does not pass their test **must call and make an appointment to review their graded examination**. Examination reviews are conducted in both northern and southern California.

# Another Opportunity to Hear About Job Availability

The Office of Operator Certification is not allowed to provide any personal information without express written permission from the operator. This includes mailing lists that are made available to organizations seeking applicants for job openings. If you prefer to not be included on any listing, you need do nothing. If you would like to be included on mailing lists that we provide for job openings, please fill out (or copy and fill out) the form below and return to us by mail.

Not providing a completely filled out form, including your original signature, date, certificate grade and number, and your home phone number to verify your permission will prevent us from providing personal contact information to organizations seeking applicants for job openings.

*I give the Office of Operator Certification my permission to provide contact information to organizations seeking applicants for a job opening.*

|   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| _____<br>Signature  | _____<br>Date                         |
| _____<br>Printed Name   | _____<br>Certificate Grade and Number |
| Current <b>Home</b> Phone Number to Verify the Above Permission _____ |                                       |